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ABSTRACT

The Statewide Assessment Program, administered by the Alaska Department of Education, tests all fourth and eighth graders in math and reading biennially. In 1985, the Department's Office of Evaluation, Assessment and Research undertook an evaluation of the assessment program to identify procedures which needed improvement and to determine the extent to which the assessment should be redesigned. In addition to the evaluation of test result use and assessment validity and reliability, the scope was enlarged to include opinion data on the quality of the program, appropriateness of tests, how the results might be used if the assessment should change, etc. This additional information was collected by a survey of district test representatives and by interviews with State legislators, State Board members, and Department of Education staff. The evaluation provided support for the following recommendations: (1) continue the statewide assessment of reading and mathematics for the fourth and eighth grade every other year; (2) add a secondary grade to the assessment of reading and mathematics, preferably the tenth grade; (3) provide school districts with voluntary writing assessments; (4) provide the state, State Board, school districts, legislature, and general public with individual district assessment results. The study questionnaires are appended. (PN)

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Evaluation Results of the Statewide Assessment

Executive Summary

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Evaluation Results of the Statewide Assessment

Executive Summary

by

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August 1985

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Evaluation Results of the Statewide Assessment
Executive Summary

INTRODUCTION

The Statewide Assessment Program, administered by the Alaska Department of Education, tests all fourth and eighth graders in math and reading biennially. In 1985, the Department's Office of Evaluation, Assessment, and Research undertook an evaluation of the assessment program. The purpose of the evaluation was to identify procedures which need improvement and to determine the extent to which the assessment should be redesigned.

As in the past, the use of test results and the validity and reliability of the assessment were evaluated. In addition, the scope of the evaluation was enlarged this year to include opinion data on the quality of the program, appropriateness of tests, how the results might be used if the assessment should change, etc. This additional information was collected by a survey of district testing representatives and by interviews with State Legislators, State Board members, and Department of Education staff.

Following are the findings of the assessment evaluation. I wish to thank district personnel, Legislators, the State board, the Southeast Native Commission and the Department professional staff who took the time to participate in the scheduled interviews.

For each evaluation component, an individual report with appendices is available upon request. Results of this assessment evaluation have been sent to the State Board, Legislators, the Southeast Native Commission, and school districts.

1984-85
School District
Assessment Representatives

District representatives responded to a questionnaire in the spring of 1985. Fifty-three (53) questionnaires were sent, one to each school district. All fifty-three school districts responded to the questionnaire. The following is a list of the school district assessment representatives:

Adak: Beverly Raphel
Alaska Gateway: Ralph Rudzik
Aleutian Region: Dick Anderson
Anchorage: Fred Stofflet
Annette Island: Walter Bromenschenkel
Bering Strait: Mary Rubadeau
Bristol Bay: Len Mundorf
Chatham: Duane Fryrear & Ron Gleason
Chugach: Dennis Hoyt
Copper River: Mike Johnson
Cordova: Irene Fairall-Gunnerson
Craig: John DeLong
Delta-Greely: Doug Whitener
Dillingham: Wes Hill
Fairbanks North Star: Mary Francis
Galena: Gail Higgins
Haines: Allen Heinrich
Hoonah: Kenneth Dettering
Hydaburg: Richard Gigo
Iditarod: Mike Baumgartner
Juneau: David Thomas
Kake: Charlotte Conner
Kenai Peninsula: Dennis Daggett
Ketchikan Gateway: Ron Hamberger
King Cove: Lorelei Jutras
Klawock: Bill Denkinger
Kodiak Island: Dennis Nicholson
Kuspuk: Bill Wagnon
Lake & Peninsula: Jean Burns-Kateley
Lower Kuskokwim: Laura Bernhard
Lower Yukon: Roger Adams
Mat-Su: Ray Carter
Nenana: Mark Manuel
Nome: Nancy Schave
North Slope: Walter Berard
Northwest Arctic: Michael Carson
Pelican: Ralph Allen
Petersburg: John McCabe
Pribilof: Rick Luthi
Railbelt: Kathy Formella
St. Mary's: Herb Oba
Sand Point: Cy Crawley
Sitka: Terry Coon
Skagway: David Lannigan
Southeast Island: Dave Dossett
Southwest Region: Christopher Robinson
Tanana: Ron DeLay
Unalaska: Robert Mutch
Valdez: Alice Bosshard
Wrangell: Robert Prunella & Dick Barton
Yakutat: Stan Vogel
Yukon Flats: Robert Cook
Yukon/Koyukuk: Niki McCurry

1985
ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

A memorandum was sent to each legislator in January 1985 describing the assessment evaluation and a reminder was sent out again in early February. Twenty-eight legislators responded that they would like to participate in the evaluation of the assessment program. Due to the press of legislative activity, however, only thirteen legislators actually completed the evaluation interviews.

HOUSE

Albert P. Adams
Johne Binkley
Red Boucher
Bette Cato
Don Clocksin
Virginia Collins
Sam Cotten
Mike Davis
Jim Duncan
Steve Frank
John G. "Jack" Fuller
Walt Furnace
Peter Goll
Max Gruenberg
Ben F. Grussendorf
Alyce A. Hanley
Adelheid Herrmann
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David Thompson
Rick Uehling
Kay Wallis

SENATE

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Don Bennett
Jack Coghill
Edna DeVries
Richard I. Eliason
Bettye Fahrenkamp
Jan Faiks
Frank R. Ferguson
Paul Fischer
Vic Fischer
Rick Halford
Joe Josephson
Tim Kelly
Jalmar M. Kerttula
Bill Ray
Patrick M. Rodey
John C. Sackett
Arliss Sturgulewski
Fred Zharoff
Robert H. Ziegler, Sr.

ALASKA STATE BOARD
OF EDUCATION

All but one State Board member participated in the evaluation of the assessment program. With few exceptions, responses from the State Board came from a single perspective, giving clear direction for future statewide assessment activity.

Ernestine Griffin
Barney Gottstein
Mary Schaeffer
William Eubank
Don Gray
Sue Hull
Janie Leask
Robin Bucaria
Col. Roger K. Strosnider
Katie Henry

METHOD

Several aspects of the statewide assessment program were covered by the evaluation, including validity, reliability, possible item bias, and opinions about its appropriateness and usability. This report will focus on the data gathered from school districts, the State Board, the Legislature, the Southeast Native Commission, and Department of Education professional staff.

The information was collected in three stages:
First, in February, professional staff from the department were interviewed regarding their understanding of the assessment program and use of the assessment results. To reduce bias, outside evaluators, Dr. Evelyn Brzezinski of Interwest Applied Research and Dr. Phillip Kearney of the University of Michigan were employed.

Second, the assesssment director collected data from the State Board, Legislators and members of the Southeast Native Commission. This portion of the evaluation usually took the form of individual interviews, using an interview schedule. Individuals were shown an eleven minute slide/tape presentation for the purpose of providing a standard knowledge base. Then each individual was asked to respond to eight questions relating to current and possible future assessment practices.

The final component of this evaluation sought information from school districts. Our contractor, Interwest Applied Research sent questionnaires to the fifty three school districts. All districts responded.

CURRENT ASSESSMENT PRACTICES

School Districts

In each school district, a staff person is selected to be the test representative. The test representative is in charge of the statewide assessment for that district and is the liaison with the Department of Education. School district testing representatives were sent questionnaires that addressed the 1985 testing logistics and content; possible changes in the assessment; and the testing representative job. All fifty-three districts responded to the questionnaire.

A set of six questions asked for opinions about the level of effort required of the representatives and acceptance of the assessment in school districts. Districts were asked to respond either that the statement was "True", "False" or "Neutral". The results were surprising. Only one testing representative found the job to be too time consuming, and respondents were quite positive about other aspects of the job, as well. The responses to the six questions are found in Table 1.

Table 1

	True	Neutral	False
The job was too time consuming.	1	13	39
I got good cooperation from local staff on the testing.	50	3	0
I would like to get more information about the results to share with staff.	27	18	8
I found the test rep job interesting.	18	31	4
I think the staff in my district understand the Assessment's purpose.	27	18	8
I will continue, or try to continue, to be a test rep.	45	4	4

Districts were asked to respond to nine questions on current assessment practices: seven on logistics and two on content. The latter provide insights into the usefulness of assessment results. Districts were asked to respond to these nine questions with "OK as is," "Needs improvement" or "Don't Know". The seven questions that queried districts on logistics of the assessment obtained high marks. With few exceptions, districts are satisfied with the way the assessment process works.

The two questions that addressed test content or reporting indicate some improvement may be necessary. To the question on "appropriateness of tests' content for your students", seven districts of the fifty three indicated that it needs improvement. To the question on reporting of test results, three districts responded that improvement was needed. Table 2 provides the responses to the nine questions.

Table 2

	OK as is	Needs improvement	Don't know/ No opinion
Logistics			
Paperwork for collecing student enrollments	50	2	1
Distribution of testing materials to schools	52	1	0
Quality (attractiveness, clarity, etc.) of the tests	49	2	2
Quality of associated administration materials	51	2	0
Turnaround time for scoring results	48	1	4
Help available during the assessment process	46	0	7
Keeping you informed about assessment procedures	51	1	1
Content			
Appropriateness of tests' content for your students	36	7	10
Class reports and Interpretive Guide	44	3	6

From these responses it appears that with only minor exceptions, districts are satisfied with the current assessment. In their view, testing procedures and logistics appear to be working well.

State Board, Legislature and Southeast Native Commission

Interviews were conducted with eight of the nine State Board members, thirteen Legislators and ten members of the Southeast Native Commission. The structured interview asked eight questions, four of which looked at current assessment practices. The following questions were asked:

1. Does student achievement level influence your educational policy decisions?

2. How pleased are you with only testing the 4th and 8th grades?

3. How pleased are you with testing every other year?

4. Are you satisfied with only reading and mathematics content testing?

Responses:
1. Every group felt that student achievement levels influence their decisions about education. However, achievement alone was not the only aspect of education they looked at.

2. All respondents felt that the 4th and 8th grades were appropriate; however, almost to a person they felt additional grades should be added. When the cost of testing was taken into consideration, this opinion was tempered somewhat. The cost of testing, however, did not alter significantly the opinions of any group in any of the areas: additional grade levels, content areas, or more frequent testing.

3. For the most part there was only a slight interest in testing more frequently at the state level. Most of the groups felt that if more detailed information was needed about student achievement, district test results could furnish it.

4. All respondents felt that obtaining achievement data in reading and mathematics was necessary. As mentioned above, they suggested testing additional grade levels in these two content areas, and there were indications that additional content areas should be added.

Appendix A provides the mean response to all the questions by group. Complete results of these interviews are in the full report, which is available from the department.

Department of Education, Professional Staff

A random selection of twenty four professional staff from various programs were interviewed by these outside contractors. An attempt was made to obtain at least one professional from each program area within the Department of Education. The interview included three open-ended questions and 27 questions with answers on a 5-point Likert type scale. The contractors summarize the perceptions of these staff members as follows:

Respondents' Knowledge of the Assessment Program:

The first six questions in the interview probed the respondents' knowledge of the Alaska Statewide Assessment Program as it currently exists. Perhaps surprisingly, over two-thirds of the respondents appeared "quite informed" to "well informed" about who is tested, the grades at which the test is administered and subjects covered. Somewhat fewer were as certain about how often the test is given and how long the Assessment has been operating.

Interviewees were also asked seven questions about the degree of contact they had had with the Assessment Program. While three-fourths of the respondents were aware of the project's Assessment Report newsletters, fewer than half felt they were aware of the testing results. But since the bulk of the Assessment Reports are devoted to discussions of results, this may indicate that DOE staff recognize the information is available but do not investigate further. In addition, relatively few had participated in discussion of the results within the Department.

Use of the Assessment Data:

Four questions dealt with the usefulness of assessment information to the interviewee. A principal concern of Assessment Program staff has been the seeming unwillingness of Department staff to use the assessment results in their own activities. It was, therefore, surprising to learn that over half of the interviewees felt they "definitely" or "likely" would use assessment information in their decision making. As an example, about half of all respondents believed they would (or the Department should) take decisive action if statewide scores dropped and they had adequate information about the areas of weakness. A somewhat smaller group (9 persons) responded that they would take action to improve individual schools with poor scores.

Unfortunately, the greatest single factor identified as the "roadblock" preventing staff from using the assessment information immediately was they felt it was not their responsibility to use the data. This supports that intuitive perspective gained of the interviewers that the use made of the assessment data by the DOE staff depends more on day-to-day Department priorities than long-range goals of the Assessment Program.

Overall Perceptions of the Assessment Program:

Interviewees answered three questions on their perceptions of the Assessment program. The Department of Education staff believe the program to be well run; over three-quarters of those interviewed had favorable comments about the program's operation. Only about half of the respondents (11 out of 24), however, felt the program was "quite important" or "very important" to the Department.

This result is better than expected, however, when one considers that virtually none of the staff believes the Department has strongly supported the Assessment Program to date. Only two interviewees indicated that it was "well-supported" by the Department of Education; no one felt it was extremely well-supported. The majority of respondents chose negative (below neutral) responses.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The results of this evaluation suggest future directions for the statewide assessment program.

District Test Representatives

Eight items in the district representatives' interviews addressed possible changes to the Statewide Assessment. These areas included adding a writing assessment and a high school test, changing the frequency of testing, and using different procedures for publicity and score comparisons. Respondents indicated whether they would "Encourage the change," "Object to the change," or "Neither encourage nor object."

Three changes received high numbers of favorable responses: 1) include a high school grade in the test, 2) make national comparisons with test results, and 3) provide assistance on using test results.

Including a high school grade in the testing received the highest number of favorable responses. Encouraging the change were 35, while 11 objected. Testing representatives appeared to be seeking more information to help them in interpreting and using their assessment results to improve instruction; 34 would enourage such assistance while 5 objected to it.. Thirty-four representatives support the idea of comparing test scores to equivalent national performance; 7 objected.

Opinion is split on the addition of a writing assessment. The concept of making the writing assessment voluntary elicited twice as many positive responses (22) as negative (11). However, the number of responses to the possibility of making the writing assessment mandatory was evenly split (20 enourage, 20 discourage).

Opinion is much more favorable now than in the past toward comparing district scores (25 encourage, 17 object).

Possible changes that received the most objections were testing every year instead of every two years (29 objected) and adding a mandatory writing assessment to the testing (20 objected).

The questions and responses in this section are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

	Encourage the change	Neither encourage nor discourage	Object to the change	No opinion/ Blank
Add a voluntary writing assessment to the testing	22	19	11	1
Add a mandatory writing assessment to the testing	20	13	20	0
Test every year, instead of every two years	16	7	29	1
Include a high school grade in the testing	35	7	11	0
District scores compared to other districts	25	10	17	1
Scores compared to equivalent national performance	34	10	7	2
More publicity to the assessment results	7	31	13	2
Assistance on using results to improve instruction	34	14	5	0

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Department of Education, Professional Staff

Department staff members who were interviewed were asked seven questions on assessment design and policies including expanding the grade levels or subjects, the frequency of testing and comparison of scores.

Only half of those interviewed felt that testing just reading and math was adequate. Suggestions for other subjects were science (2 responses), writing (2), and social studies. There was modest support for testing additional grade levels, with sixth and tenth grade each mentioned twice.

There was substantial support among interviewees for making available district-level results from the Statewide Assessment. Most supported the release of such results as a necessary element of the department's technical effort. One-third of those interviewed were satisfied with the present policy of no interdistrict comparison.

State Board, Legislature and Southeast Native Commission

The views of these policy making groups on testing other grades or subjects and the frequency of testing were mentioned earlier. Briefly, most felt that additional grades should be given the Assessment. There were indications that additional content areas should be added, but there was only slight interest in testing more frequently.

These groups were also asked three questions on the future use of test results which required responses on the same scale of 1 to 5.

5. Do you wish the Department to construct Alaska norms?

6. Do you wish the Department to compare Alaskan results to national norms?

7. Do you support the comparison of district results within Alaska?

Both the State Board and Southeast Native Commission expressed interest in comparing test results with Alaska norms; the mean response for State Board members was 4.1; for Native Commission members, 4.0. When considering the cost, the State Board showed slightly more interest, with a mean of 4.4. (See Appendix A)

Of the three groups, the State Board showed the greatest interest in interdistrict comparison of test scores, with a mean of 4.1. The Legislature had a mean of 3.8, and the Native Commission, a mean of 3.6. These results are presented in the appendix along with the actual counts per response. (See Appendix B)

ASSESSMENT
RECOMMENDATIONS

An evaluation of the statewide assessment using school district representatives, the State Board of Education, state legislators, the Southeast Native Commission and professional staff from the Department of Education provided a clear support for the following recommendations.

1. Continue the statewide assessment of reading and mathematics for the 4th and 8th grade every other year.

2. Add a secondary grade to the assessment of reading and mathematics, preferably the 10th grade.

3. Provide school districts with voluntary writing assessments.

4. Provide the state, State Board, school districts, Legislature, and general public with individual district assessment results.

APPENDIX A
(Mean Responses)

Questions asked of State Board of Education, Alaska Legislators, and Southeast Native Commission

	Mean Responses		
	SB	Leg	NC
1. Does the achievement level of Alaskan students influence your policy decisions? 1 = would not influence my decisions 3 = possibly would influence my decisions 5 = would influence my decisions a great deal	3.8	4.0	4.1
2. How pleased are you with testing only the 4th and 8th grades? 1 = more grade coverage is not necessary 3 = we should possibly have more coverage 5 = we definitely need more coverage	3.4	3.2	3.1
3. How pleased are you with testing only every other year? 1 = no, usefulness would not be improved if given every other year 3 = possibly usefulness would be improved 5 = usefulness would definitely be improved if given yearly	2.9	1.9	3.0
4. Are you satisfied with testing only in reading and mathematics? 1 = test only reading and math 3 = possibly increase content of assessment 5 = definitely increase content offerings in the assessment	3.1	2.8	3.6
5. Do you wish the Department to construct Alaska norms? 1 = no, comparisons should not be made among Alaskan students 3 = possibly comparisons should be made 5 = definitely, Alaskan students should be compared	4.1	3.4	4.0

SB = State School Board of Education
Leg = Legislators
NC = Southeast Native Commission

6. Do you wish the Department to compare Alaskan results to national norms?	SB	Leg	NC
1 = no Alaskan student should be compared with a national sample	3.3	3.2	3.5
3 = possibly some comparisons should be made			
5 = definitely compare Alaskan and national students			

7. Do you support the comparison of district results within Alaska?	SB	Leg	NC
1 = no, do not compare districts	4.1	3.8	3.6
3 = possibly compare districts			
5 = definitely compare districts			

SB = State School Board of Education
Leg = Legislators
NC = Southeast Native Commission

APPENDIX B
(Number of Responses)

Questions asked of State Board of Education, Alaska Legislators, and Southeast Native Commission

1. Would the achievement level of students significantly influence your decisions about Alaska education?

1=would not influence my decisions
3=possibly influence my decisions
5=would influence my decisions a great deal

Response	Number
1	1
2	2
3	3
4	17
5	8
total	31

2. How pleased are you with testing only the 4th and 8th grades?

1=more grade coverage is not necessary
3=we should possibly have more coverage
5=we definitely need more coverage

Response	Number
1	3
2	3
3	12
4	7
5	4
total	29

3. How pleased are you with testing every other year?

1=usefulness would not be improved if given every year
3=possibly usefulness would be improved
5=usefulness would definitely be improved if given yearly

Response	Number			
	State Board	Legislature	Native Commission	Total
1	3	9	1	13
2	1	1	3	5
3	0	0	2	2
4	2	1	0	3
5	2	2	2	6
total	8	13	8	29

4. How pleased are you with testing only reading and math?

1=test only reading and math
3=possibly increase content of assessment
5=definitely increase content offerings in the assessment

Response	Number
1	7
2	1
3	11
4	4
5	7
total	30

5. Do you wish the Department to construct Alaska norms?

1=no comparisons should be made among Alaskan students
3=possibly some comparisons should be made
5=definitely, Alaskan students should be compared

Response	Number
1	1
2	1
3	12
4	8
5	9
total	31

6. Do you wish the Department to compare Alaskan results to national norms?

1=Alaskan students should not be compared with a national sample
3=possibly some comparisons should be made
5=definitely compare Alaskan and national students

Response	Number
1	3
2	4
3	12
4	5
5	7
total	31

7. Do you support the comparison of district results within Alaska?

1=no, do not compare districts
3=possibly compare districts
5=definitely compare districts

Response	Number
1	3
2	3
3	4
4	8
5	13
total	31